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ABSTRACT

This theme issue of the "Bill of Rights in Action" looks at labor issues. The first article examines the unionization efforts of the Wobblies in the United States at the beginning of the 20th century. The second article explores the protests of the Luddites during Britain's Industrial Revolution. The final article looks at whether international labor rules should be adopted. Each article includes questions for class discussion and writing, a further reading list, and classroom activities. (BT)

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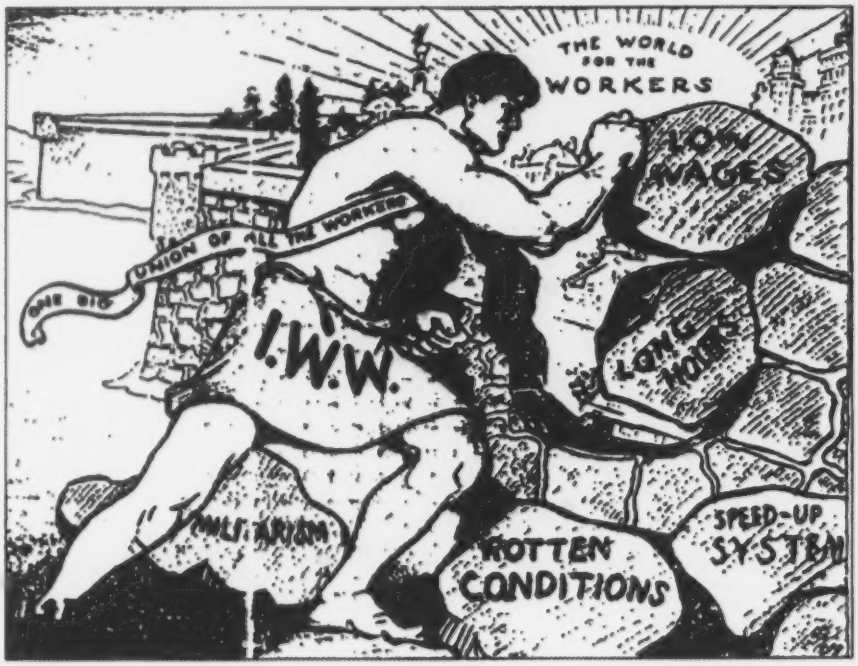
The BILL OF RIGHTS IN ACTION

CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS FOUNDATION SPRING 2001 VOLUME 17 NUMBER 2

One Big Union—One Big Strike: The Story of the Wobblies

Early in the 20th century, the Industrial Workers of the World, called the "Wobblies," organized thousands of immigrant and unskilled workers in the United States. The union eventually failed, but it helped shape the modern American labor movement.



This IWW cartoon shows the power of one big union fighting for all workers. (Underwood & Underwood/CORBIS)

In 1900, only about 5 percent of American industrial workers belonged to labor unions. Most unions were organized for skilled craft workers like carpenters and machinists. Membership in these craft unions was almost always restricted to American-born white men. The American Federation of Labor (AFL), led by Samuel Gompers, dominated the labor movement. Gompers wanted to assemble the independent craft unions into one organization, which would work to improve the pay and working conditions of the union members. Gompers and the AFL believed that unskilled factory and other industrial workers could not be organized into unions. Therefore, the vast majority of American workers, including immigrants, racial minorities, and women, remained outside the labor union movement.

US HISTORY

In 1905, a new radical union, the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), began to organize workers excluded from the AFL. Known as the "Wobblies," these unionists wanted to form "One Big Union." Their ultimate goal was to call "One Big Strike," which would overthrow the capitalist system.

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Labor

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U.S. History: One Big Union—One Big Strike: The Story of the Wobblies

World History: Marching With "General Ludd": Machine Breaking in the Industrial Revolution

U.S. Government: Globalization and Worker Rights

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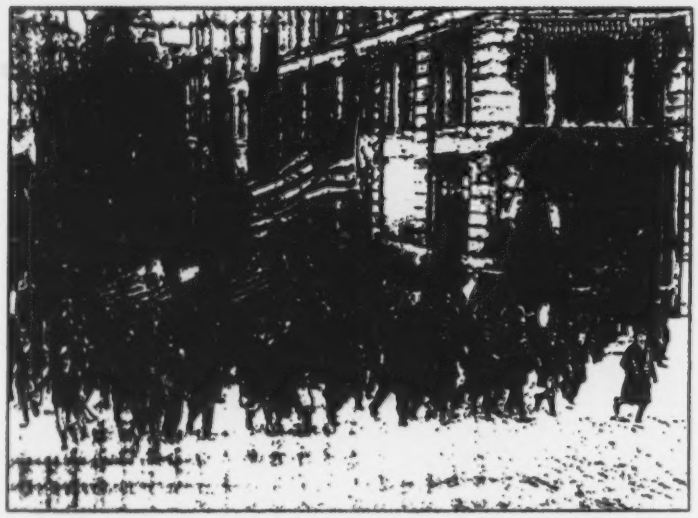
Big Bill Haywood and One Big Union

One of the main organizers for the IWW was "Big Bill" Haywood. William Dudley Haywood grew up on the rough and violent Western frontier. At age 9, he began working in copper mines. Haywood eventually married and took up homesteading in Nevada. He discovered that he liked working for himself rather than for an employer, but he lost his homestead when the land became part of an Indian reservation. Haywood reluctantly returned to the harsh life of a mine wage worker.

In the 1890s, Haywood helped form the Western Federation of Miners union. A powerful speaker, he gained the reputation as a militant union organizer and strike leader. His followers called him "Big Bill."



The IWW's most successful strike took place in Lawrence, Massachusetts, in 1912. Here, striking workers march to a textile mill. (Bettmann/CORBIS)

In 1905, Big Bill joined like-minded union leaders and socialists, anarchists, and other radicals to organize a new national union. The founding convention took place in Chicago. Big Bill called the convention to order by pounding a piece of board on the podium. He announced that the purpose of the meeting was to create a working-class movement to free workers from the "slave bondage of capitalism" and to bring workers "up to a decent plane of living."

The delegates at the convention condemned the American Federation of Labor for failing to organize the vast majority of industrial workers. They called for all workers to join their "One Big Union," which they named the Industrial Workers of the World. Their goal was to organize the working class to declare one big general strike to "take possession of the earth and the machinery of production." According to the IWW's founding document, "It is the historic mission of the working class to do away with capitalism." Once this was accomplished, a "Cooperative Commonwealth" would be established with the workers in control.

The delegates split over one important issue. The socialists at the convention, like Eugene V. Debs, wanted the IWW to engage in politics and elections. But the anarchists believed that the election system was merely a tool of capitalism. They rejected political participation and argued for "direct action" in the form of strikes, worker demonstrations, and even sabotage. The two sides finally compromised by agreeing that the IWW would operate in both areas, but would not become attached to any political party.

The Struggles of the "Wobblies"

The willingness of the IWW to sign up almost anyone gave it the reputation of being a union of hoboes, drifters, and other lowlifes. Some said that IWW stood for "I Won't Work." But Harrison Gray Otis, the anti-union owner of the *Los Angeles Times*, put into print the IWW's most lasting name: the "Wobblies."

During the early years of the IWW, the Wobblies had some successes. For example, a strike by Nevada gold miners won them an eight-hour day. But after winning a strike, the IWW often failed to follow up and establish a strong, permanent local union.

In addition, IWW leaders were often arrested and accused of violent acts. Two trials in particular stand out. In 1907, Big Bill Haywood was put on trial for the bombing murder of a former Idaho governor. Defended by famed attorney Clarence Darrow, Big Bill was acquitted when the only witness against him proved to be a liar. In 1915, union organizer Joe Hill was tried, convicted, and executed in Utah for murdering a store owner during an armed robbery. The IWW considered Hill innocent and rallied supporters with his memory. Others believed him guilty. The question of his guilt still causes controversy.

The IWW met annually in Chicago. Bitter arguments between the socialists and anarchists weakened the

union. One thing, however, drew the Wobblies together—the so-called "free speech fights" in Western cities. IWW union organizers held street meetings, condemning employers for the low pay and poor working conditions of lumberjacks, migrant laborers, and other unorganized workers. In several cities, employers persuaded the local government to pass laws banning IWW speakers from public places. The Wobblies resisted and held mass meetings, which resulted in many arrests that crowded the jails and clogged the courts. In some towns, vigilantes, supported by employers and the police, beat up the Wobblies. Things came to a climax in 1916 when vigilantes and police shot to death five Wobblies in Everett, Washington.

One Big Strike

In Lawrence, Massachusetts, more than 40,000 immigrant textile mill workers, including women and children, worked 56-hour weeks at low wages (between 12 and 16 cents per hour). In 1912, the Massachusetts state legislature reduced the legal work week for women and children to 54 hours. In response, the mill owners immediately cut the pay of all workers.

To cries of "short pay!" the Lawrence mill workers left their machines and went on strike. The small struggling IWW local union called for a city-wide general strike. "Better to starve fighting than to starve working!" the Wobblies said.

Overwhelmed by the massive walkout, the IWW local called for outside help. IWW leaders from New York City and elsewhere soon arrived to take charge. They set up a strike board made up of two representatives from each of the 25 immigrant groups participating in the strike. The board members then made their demands: a 15-percent wage increase for a 54-hour week and double pay for overtime.

The Lawrence city government called out the police and a city militia who, together with company guards, began to harass the strikers picketing the mills. Many of them were beaten and arrested. On a very cold January day, 15,000 strikers assembled in front of one factory to listen to IWW speakers. Suddenly, from inside the factory grounds, fire hoses sprayed freezing water onto the crowd. Workers rushed the factory gates and slashed the hoses. More than 30 were arrested.

On January 21, Big Bill Haywood arrived to encourage the strikers. His booming voice told workers: "Their weapon is the bayonet! Yours is solidarity! Stand fast, fellow workers, and those bayonets are less dangerous than toothpicks! Solidarity! That's the stuff!"

Haywood realized that the Lawrence strike was the first involving large numbers of unorganized foreign-born workers. He wondered if this were the beginning of the one big strike that would break the back of capitalism.

As the bitter cold days wore on, the strikers and especially their young children suffered from the lack of adequate food, clothing, and housing. Early in February, the strike board decided to evacuate the children by train to New York City and other places. After the New York press reported the arrival of the first group of ragged and starving Lawrence children, public opinion began to swing to the strikers.

When a second group of children and their mothers waited at the Lawrence train station for another evacuation, police and militia members attacked them with clubs and rifle butts. Reported in the press, this attack produced national outrage. The mill owners gave up and agreed to the strikers' demands.

Their goal was to organize the working class to declare one big general strike to "take possession of the earth and the machinery of production."

The Lawrence strike proved to be the high point of IWW influence on the American labor movement. It did not spark the long-awaited big strike to end the capitalist system. And again, the Wobblies did not develop a strong local union after the strike succeeded. Within a few years, the hard-won wage gains were wiped out by the mill owners who speeded up the pace of production.

The Chicago Trial of 1918

In 1914, World War I began in Europe. Big Bill Haywood and most other Wobblies believed the war was a capitalist plot to increase their profits. The Wobblies opposed U.S. entry into the war in 1917 and spoke out against the military draft. One IWW poster said: "Why Be a Soldier? Be a Man Join the IWW. And Fight on the Job for Yourself and Your Class."

The IWW continued to agitate for better pay and working conditions. It even led a handful of strikes against industries necessary for the war effort. But the

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Wobblies were called traitors and became the targets of more vigilante violence. One IWW union organizer was lynched in Butte, Montana.

Angered by the IWW's anti-war and anti-draft positions, President Woodrow Wilson authorized raids on IWW offices across the country on September 5, 1917. Based on the documents that were seized, 101 IWW leaders were charged with conspiracy to obstruct America's participation in the war.

The mass trial of IWW leaders, including Big Bill Haywood, took place in Chicago during April 1918, only months after the Russian Revolution. The defense tried to show that the IWW was only attempting in non-violent ways to improve the pay and conditions of American workers. The Wobblies testified that they were not trying to obstruct the war effort or to incite a revolution. Although the prosecution had a weak legal case, the radical reputation of the Wobblies influenced the jury, which found all of them guilty. Big Bill Haywood and the others were sentenced to prison terms ranging from five to 20 years plus heavy fines.

Big Bill was released from prison on bail to work on the IWW court appeal. But when the court upheld the IWW convictions in 1920, he and several others fled to the Soviet Union rather than return to prison. Big Bill's desertion of the IWW cause shocked and demoralized the IWW rank and file.

With most of their leaders in prison or exile, huge fines and court costs to pay, and disagreements over the future of the IWW, members began to abandon the union. By 1924, the IWW had dwindled to fewer than 100 members. Four years later, Big Bill Haywood died in Moscow, a broken and forgotten man.

Despite the failure of the IWW, the Wobblies did prove that large numbers of unskilled industrial workers could be successfully unionized. In the 1930s, many of them joined the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). The Wobblies also pioneered non-violent tactics like large public demonstrations and the sit-down strike.

The IWW's failure to attract a strong, permanent membership set the course for unions in the United States. American workers didn't try to overthrow capitalism and take control of industry themselves. Higher pay and better working conditions, not "one big union—one big strike," became the main priorities of most union members in the 20th century.

For Discussion and Writing

1. What was the meaning of "one big union—one big strike"?
2. Do you think the federal government was justified in putting the IWW leaders on trial in 1918? Why or why not?
3. What do you think was the most important reason for the failure of the IWW? Explain your answer.

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ACTIVITY

Labor Movement at the Turn of the 20th Century

Many people and events played an important role in the labor movement at the turn of the 20th century. Among them were:

- "Big Bill" Haywood
- Samuel Gompers
- Eugene V. Debs
- Mary "Mother" Jones
- Jacob Riis
- Joe Hill
- Great Strike of 1877
- Haymarket Riot
- Pullman Strike
- Molly McGuires
- AFL
- CIO
- Triangle Shirtwaist Fire
- Keatings Owen Child Labor Bill
- John Mitchell of the United Mine Workers
- Homestead Strike
- Ludlow Massacre
- Bombing of the *Los Angeles Times* in 1910

A. In this activity, form pairs to each research one of the people, organizations, or events named above. Group members should use library resources and the Internet to investigate their subject. They should prepare a brief presentation to the class on their subject. It should include:
   1. An interesting profile of the person, organization, or event.
   2. The reason why this person, organization, or event is important in the history of American labor.

B. Each pair should report its findings and conclusions to the class.

Marching With "General Ludd": Machine Breaking in the Industrial Revolution

Workers attack a mechanical loom during England's Industrial Revolution. (Bettmann/CORBIS)

In the early 1800s, machines began to radically change the lives of many English cloth workers. Skilled and proud of their handmade products, many workers revolted by smashing the machines that threatened their way of life. Lacking a central leader, the workers claimed to follow a mythical figure called "General Ludd," apparently named after an apprentice named Ned Ludd who once smashed a mechanical loom. Today, the term "Luddite" is still used to refer to people resisting technological change.

For centuries, English women worked at home with spinning wheels to make wool and cotton yarn. Men wove the yarn into cloth on hand looms at home or in small village shops. Finishers, called "croppers," wielded heavy shears to remove the nap, or fuzz, on the woven cloth. Others worked by hand to make articles of clothing such as knitted stockings for both men and women.

WORLD HISTORY

During the early 1800s, several conditions threatened the livelihood of English cloth workers. Bad harvests increased food prices. War with Napoleon in Europe and with the United States in America disrupted trade, cutting the demand for cloth overseas. Falling wages, unemployment, and hunger added to the misery of many workers and their families.

To keep their businesses alive, employers started cutting costs. Instead of paying craftsmen to make cloth and clothing by hand in their homes and small shops, employers increasingly turned to machines. At first, they shifted to machines that workers could use in their homes, but gradually they switched to machines powered by water or steam in large factories. Machines could do the work of many craftsmen and could be tended by relatively few workers, even women and children.

"Engines of Mischief"

These Engines of mischief were sentenced to die
By unanimous vote of the Trade,
And Ludd who can all opposition defy
Was the Grand executioner made.

—from a Luddite song

In the county of Nottinghamshire, employers rented out hand-operated machine looms, called stocking frames, to workers in small shops. Workers used the stocking frame to knit stockings, hats, gloves, scarves, and other small articles of clothing. The employers paid these workers by the pieces of work they completed. The employers encouraged unskilled apprentices, usually teenage boys, to take up the stocking-frame trade. Production soared because of these machines, but worker wages sank, and the quality of goods declined. Anger mounted, especially among the traditional hand knitters, who couldn't compete with the stocking-frame workers.

To the north, Yorkshire was the center for wool-cloth finishing. This involved cleaning, stretching, pressing,

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and cropping. Croppers cut off the nap on the cloth, using shears that were four feet long and weighed 40 pounds. Experienced and skilled, Croppers took great pride in their work. But increasingly, unskilled workers were doing the same kind of work with machines called gig mills and shearing frames. One cropper wrote, "now gigs and shearing frames are like to become general, if they are allowed to go on many hundreds of us will be out of bread."

For a long time, neighboring Lancashire was the major region in England for hand spinning and weaving. By 1790, factories with machines powered by water or steam engines began to appear in Lancashire and other cloth-making counties. Lancashire workers who still spun and wove cotton cloth by hand gradually saw their wages go down and their jobs disappear.

Technological changes brought on by the Industrial Revolution disrupted village and family life, forcing many into squalid conditions in rapidly growing cities. (Bettmann/CORBIS)

Shifting the workplace from the home and village shop to large factories radically disrupted family and community life. Unskilled women and children tended the factory machines. They often worked 12 hours or more a day behind locked doors. Factory workers could be fined for talking on the job. Heat, noise, cotton dust, and machine accidents constantly threatened their health.

Factory owners and employers who rented stocking frames and other machines to men still working at home or in small shops sought ever-increasing production and profit. Most employers supported a laissez faire economy—one with no government interference in how they ran their enterprises or treated their workers. In 1899, a laissez faire–minded Parliament repealed worker protections going back to the days of Queen Elizabeth. Parliament also rejected worker pleas for a minimum-wage law and made trade unions illegal. The times were ripe for a worker rebellion.

"The Hero of Nottinghamshire"

Chant no more your old rhyme
about bold Robin Hood,
His feats I but little admire.
I will sing the Achievements of
General Ludd,
Now the Hero of
Nottinghamshire.

—from a Luddite song

In 1811, food riots and stocking-frame breaking erupted in Nottinghamshire, where the legendary Robin Hood lived. Since trade unions were illegal, workers formed secret, underground groups that sent threatening letters to employers and local officials. The letters were usually signed by the mysterious "Ned Ludd."

Soon the Luddites were arming themselves, training in secret, and marching on nighttime raids against shops and factories where they smashed the hated stocking frames. By the end of 1811, they had destroyed about 1,000 frames.

The English government responded by planting spies, offering rewards to informers, and sending several thousand troops into the troubled area. But the authorities had little success in cracking the Luddite code of secrecy. Seven Luddites, aged 16 to 22, were put on trial, convicted, and sent to the prison colony of Australia. Luddite raids and other activities in Nottinghamshire finally ended in the spring of 1812 when Parliament passed a law that made machine breaking a death-penalty offense.

The scene then shifted northward to Yorkshire and Lancashire. As in Nottinghamshire, secret bands marched at night under the banner of "General Ludd." They sought out and destroyed gig mills, shearing frames, power looms, and other machines. This time, though, the Luddite raiders met armed resistance.

"With Hatchet, Pike, and Gun"

And night by night when all is still,
And the moon is hid behind the hill,
We forward march to do our will
With hatchet, pike, and gun.

—from a Luddite song

The most famous Luddite raid took place in 1812 against a factory in Yorkshire owned by William Cartwright. Cartwright's factory contained 50 water-powered shearing frames, each doing the work of four or five croppers with their heavy cutting shears. Cartwright was determined to protect his property from the Luddite machine breakers. He and 10 of his workmen, all armed with muskets, remained inside the factory at night to defend it in case of attack.

Shortly after midnight on April 11, 1812, local Luddite leader George Mellor, a 24-year-old cropper, marched with about 150 other workers to Cartwright's factory. Armed with hatchets, pikes (similar to spears), and guns, the Luddites swarmed in front of the four-story factory. Some began to throw stones at the windows. Others began to strike its heavy main door with sledgehammers.

From inside the building, Cartwright and his men began shooting at the Luddite attackers, the first time this had ever happened. Cartwright also ordered one of his men to ring the factory bell to alert a troop of cavalry stationed nearby. The surprised Luddites began shooting back into the factory, and an exchange of gunfire took place for about 20 minutes.

Mellor encouraged his men who were still pounding away at the factory door. "Bang up my lads," he cried. "In with you. Kill every one of them!" But the solid door held.

Fearing the arrival of cavalry, Mellor ordered his men to retreat. The Luddites left two of their men dead in front of the factory. Several others died later of gunshot wounds. Among the factory defenders, only Cartwright was wounded. He became an instant hero to factory owners and government authorities, who redoubled their efforts to crush the Luddite threat.

The violence was not over. About two weeks after the battle at Cartwright's factory, another factory owner, William Horsfall, was ambushed and shot to death. Horsfall had taunted that he wished he could ride through streets filled with Luddite blood.

Food riots and machine breaking spread to neighboring Lancashire. A dozen more Luddites were killed. The widespread violence in the three counties produced a growing fear of a general rebellion. Even so, Parliament still refused to address the grievances and suffering of the workers and their families.

"We Will Never Lay Down Arms"

We will never lay down Arms [until] The House of Commons passes an Act to put down all Machinery hurtful to [the common people], and repeal that [law] to hang Frame Breakers.

—from a letter to the government
signed by "Ned Ludd"

The English government decided to use fear and force to destroy the Luddite movement. The government sent more than 10,000 British troops into Nottinghamshire, Yorkshire, and Lancashire. The authorities also offered pardons to those who renounced their oath to "General Ludd." Paid informers and spies reported the names of local Luddite leaders and testified against them in court. Soldiers broke up Luddite meetings, made arrests, and forced confessions.

George Mellor, the leader of the Cartwright factory raid, and two other Luddite leaders were tried for the murder of factory owner William Horsfall. Convicted largely on the testimony of an informer, Mellor and the others refused to break the Luddite code of silence. They were hanged in January 1813. A short time later, 14 other Yorkshire Luddites were tried and hanged for attacks on factories and machine breaking. Another 10 were executed after trials in Lancashire.

Scattered attacks against machines and factories continued for a few more years, but the Luddite movement was finished. Thousands of machines and even entire factories had been destroyed. But the defeat of "General Ludd" brought on by military force, trials, and hangings cleared the way for England's Industrial Revolution.

By the 1830s, the factory system had just about replaced most of England's hand spinners, weavers, and croppers. Laissez-faire economics and the machine ruled the lives of most English workers.

Luddites Today

Although the Luddite movement died long ago, the term "Luddite" survives. It means a person who resists technological change. It is commonly used as an insult. It can be applied to a person who favors a typewriter

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over a computer or who has never learned to drive a car. This insult, fair or not, may be hurled at anyone who objects to the use of a new technology. These individuals include environmental activists, those who object to human cloning, opponents of nuclear power and radiated food as well as workers whose jobs are threatened by automation and computers. As the pace of technological innovation increases, it is likely that many people will resist some aspects of new technology. It is also likely that their opponents will call them "Luddites."

For Discussion and Writing

1. How did the factory system radically change the way of life of English workers in the early 1800s?
2. Think of yourself as a self-employed cropper, living in Yorkshire, England, in 1812. Why would you be angry at factory owners like William Cartwright?
3. Do you agree or disagree with the methods used by the English government to put down the Luddite revolt? Why?
4. What kinds of technology today do people find threatening? Do you believe their fears are justified? Explain.

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ACTIVITY

The Consequences of Technology

Like the Luddites, we live in an age of rapid changes in technology. At the beginning of the 20th century, most people used horses for transportation, read books and went to live theater for entertainment, and could only send messages long distance by mail or telegraph. By the end of the century, all this had changed and much more. The technological changes—in medicine, communications, transportation, entertainment, warfare, and most other areas—have been staggering. In this activity, students evaluate the significance of these changes.

A. As a class, brainstorm and make a list of the most important technological breakthroughs in the 20th century.

B. Following the brainstorm, form small groups. Each group should should discuss and answer the following questions:

   1. What do you think was the single most significant technological breakthrough in the 20th century? Why?
   2. What consequences did this breakthrough have on society?
   3. Which of the consequences were positive? Why?
   4. Which of the consequences were negative? Why?
   5. What do you think can be done to increase the positive consequences and decrease the negative consequences of this technology?

C. Each group should prepare to report its answers to the class.

D. Have each group report and hold a class discussion.

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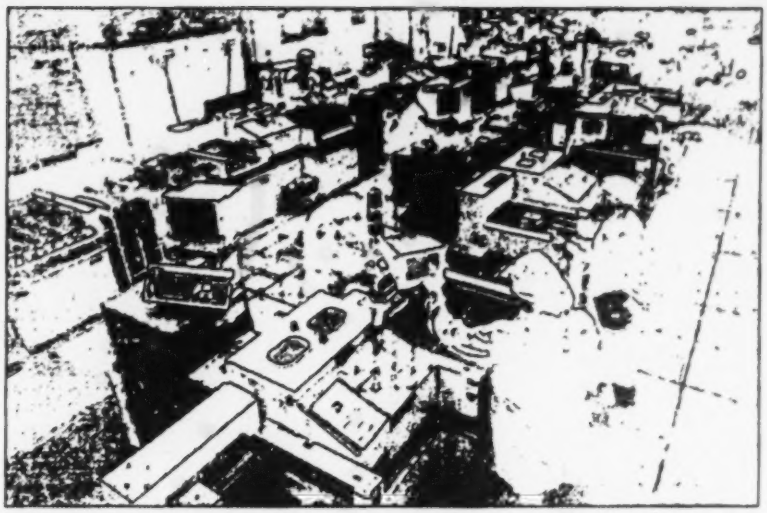
Globallzatlon and Worker Rights

Capitalism has triumphed in a globalized economy. International organizations are helping to eliminate trade barriers. But no international organization is enforcing labor standards worldwide. Do we need international labor standards in the new world economy?



In the new global economy, products are assembled from parts made around the world. Here, workers in a Thailand factory produce computer chips. (Charles O'Rear/CORBIS)

As the result of international agreements made at the end of World War II, capital investors and businesses have been able to move their money, enterprises, and products more freely across national borders. International free-trade agreements have led to increasing business competition, efficiency, and profits on a global scale.

Economic globalization has created millions of jobs and produced more affordable goods for consumers. But some say that the global economy needs international labor standards. These would provide minimum standards for worker safety and pay. Others respond that individual nations must decide for themselves on labor standards.

U S GOVERNMENT

Making a Global Economy

The International Labor Organization (ILO) was established in 1919 as part of the agreements that ended World War I. The ILO created a set of international labor standards. The standards included an "adequate wage," an eight-hour work day, the abolition of child labor, and the right of workers to join labor unions. The ILO standards were thought necessary to meet the challenge of Communism. (The Russian Communist Revolution had recently occurred.) But the standards were voluntary, and most nations, including the United States, ignored them.

In 1944, toward the end of World War II, U.S. and other allied economic leaders met to design the world's post-war economy. The American secretary of the treasury, Henry Morgenthau, and the other economic leaders believed that high unemployment and barriers to international trade had been contributing causes of the devastating war. The leaders agreed that to prevent future world wars, nations would have to cooperate in a globalized economy created by free trade. Each nation would also have to establish a "safety net" of worker protections to reduce unemployment and poverty.

To help achieve free trade and employment, Morgenthau and the others formed the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. These financial institutions lent money to countries for them to develop their economies and participate fully in international trade. The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, later renamed the World Trade Organization (WTO), set the rules for trade agreements among nations.

Representatives of financial institutions, corporations, and governments have always participated in IMF, World Bank, and WTO decision-making, but workers have been excluded. The old International Labor Organization established after World War I still exists, but it has no legal authority to enforce ILO labor standards. Meanwhile, treaties and the financial power of the IMF and the other international finance and trade institutions have made sure that free trade and private enterprise thrive under globalization.

Globalization and Labor

The opening of free trade and business investment in the world created tremendous economic growth for nearly three decades following World War II. Even the poorest countries benefitted by putting their people to work in new export industries.

(Continued on next page)

But those supporting international labor standards voice concern over recent trends. As competition among businesses has increased, a so-called "race to the bottom" seems to have begun. Many companies have moved to countries with the lowest wages and tax rates. This has increased employment in poor countries, but 1.3 billion workers today still earn less than $1 a day with little or no "safety net" to help them. In these countries, sweatshops, child labor, industrial pollution, and poor worker health and safety conditions are commonplace.

In Europe and most of the other industrialized areas of the world, high-paying export jobs created by free-trade agreements have helped many workers. But in many places unemployment has grown and economic growth has slowed. At the end of the 20th century, the United States experienced an eight-year economic boom. It saw the stock market soar, unemployment dwindle, and most people's incomes increase. Wages for unskilled workers, however, stalled, health and other benefits decreased, and union membership has fallen dramatically.

Economic globalization has created millions of jobs and produced more affordable goods for consumers.

Those favoring international labor standards say some large U.S. employers have used the threat of moving outside the country to deter union organizing. Others disagree. They point out that the United States has changed from a manufacturing to a service economy. This, they say, has eroded the base of industrial unions.

In 1994, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) went into effect. This agreement among the United States, Canada, and Mexico dropped trade barriers and furthered the goal of free trade. So far, NAFTA has probably been a net plus for the U.S. economy. For example, the South lost tens of thousands of textile and furniture manufacturing jobs to low-wage workers in Mexico. But most unemployed Southerners soon found work in new high-tech factories, making such things as fiber-optic cable and computer chips. Often, foreign investors built these factories to take advantage of the South's strategic location in the middle of the North American free-trade area.

American labor unions have strongly opposed NAFTA. Labor leaders argue that if NAFTA and other free-trade agreements can protect the rights of globalized businesses, why not protect the rights of workers in poor developing countries? Currently, fines and other penalties do exist for national child-labor and minimum-wage law violations. But it is up to each country to handle its own cases. Business leaders claim that labor unions are demanding burdensome labor regulations in free-trade agreements to protect the jobs of their members.

Sweatshops

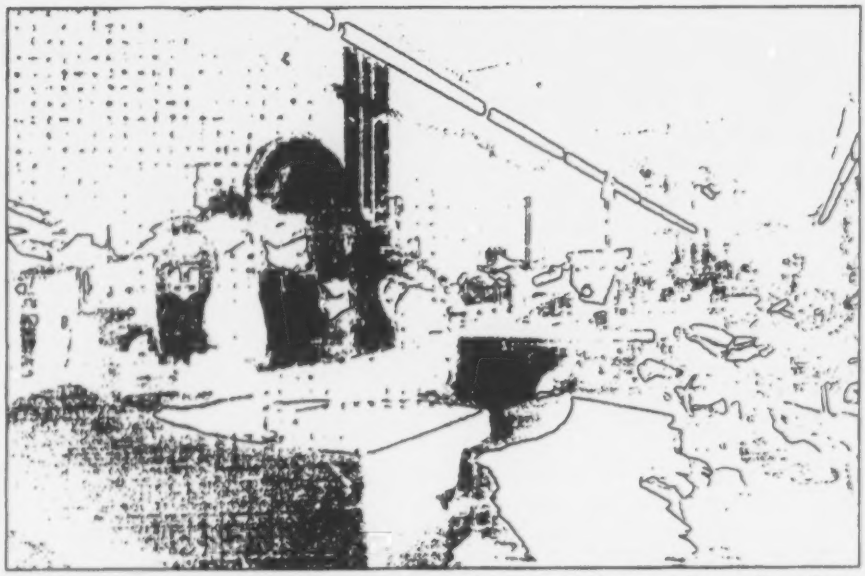
Those favoring international labor standards stress the need to eradicate sweatshops. Many companies in the global economy search for countries with the cheapest possible labor. They often arrange with local employers to hire factory workers to do low-wage work for long hours under appalling conditions. A young woman from Bangladesh described her work in a clothing factory:

> I sewed on collars. I was paid [about $10] a month. I often worked overtime and was not paid. I worked from 7 a.m. till 10 p.m. or sometimes all night, for seven days a week. I had 30 minutes for lunch and we had to eat at our machines—we were not allowed to leave the factory.

Recent investigations by *Business Week* magazine and others confirm that sweatshop workers are frequently cheated on their wages, forced to work overtime, exposed to dangerous chemicals and machinery, locked inside during working hours, and even beaten for being tardy.

Yet, poor developing nations often defend sweatshops. They say that the low-cost factories provide needed income for families who are struggling to survive. In many of these countries, working for 60 cents an hour 12 hours a day is a step up from poverty. Moreover, is it really fair for the United States and other advanced countries to try to force their labor standards onto countries that are just beginning to industrialize? After all, sweatshop conditions were common in the United States 100 years ago during our own industrial revolution.

Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn, reporters on Asia for the *New York Times*, argue that sweatshops, for all the pain they cause, also produce change. They contrast India, which "resisted foreign exploitation," with Taiwan and South Korea, which "accepted sweatshops as the price of development." Today, they say, "Taiwan and South Korea are modern countries with low rates of infant mortality and high levels of education; in contrast, every year 3.1 million Indian children die before the age of 5, mostly from diseases of poverty like diarrhea."



A young woman wears a face mask to protect herself from dust and lint particles in a Hong Kong sweat shop. (Paul A. Souders/CORBIS)

U.S. clothing manufacturers have received much publicity lately over sweatshops. One incident involved Saipan, part of the Northern Mariana Islands in the South Pacific. This group of islands has U.S. commonwealth status similar to Puerto Rico. Many big-name American clothing companies contracted with Saipan employers to hire workers from several Asian countries to manufacture garments that could legally be labeled "Made in U.S.A."

In 1999, class action lawsuits were filed on behalf of 50,000 Saipan sweatshop workers. According to the plaintiffs, workers were charged up to $10,000 apiece to work in a Saipan factory. They were then forced to work overtime without pay until their "recruitment fee" was paid off. This amounted to indentured servitude, which has been illegal in the United States since the Civil War. The workers were also allegedly forced to sign contracts, promising not to date, get pregnant, or even attend church since these things could interfere with their work.

The publicity surrounding the Saipan lawsuits was a public relations disaster for the American clothing companies. By spring of 2000, most of the companies had settled out of court. They agreed to a "Saipan Code of Conduct," holding local labor contractors accountable to strict standards regarding worker overtime pay, job safety, and basic civil rights. The companies also agreed to pay the workers $8 million as compensation for the conditions under which they were forced to work.

Child Labor

In the developing countries of the world today, an estimated 250 million children age 5–14 work all sorts of jobs—from farming to mining. Poor countries often argue that child labor is necessary for their struggling economies and for family survival. But there is also a cost for working children in terms of missed schooling and poor health.

In 1999, the United States and 173 other nations signed a treaty that outlawed the harshest forms of child labor. Among other things, the treaty banned children from jobs that endangered their safety, health, or morals. The treaty, however, did not forbid work that interferes with children getting an education. This was unrealistic, according to poor developing countries that depend on child labor and do not have well-developed public education systems.

Protesting Globalization

The World Trade Organization (WTO) is made up of officials from nations around the world who meet to decide the rules for free trade. Late in 1999, the WTO met in Seattle, Washington, but encountered large, noisy, and sometimes violent protests.

Tens of thousands of protesters including labor leaders, environmentalists, human-rights activists, and many

other groups demonstrated against WTO policies. Although incidents of window breaking and clashes with police received much publicity, more important stories were taking place. One story was the coming together of so many different groups protesting problems of globalization. The Seattle protests began to make Americans aware of issues over sweatshops, child labor, and the absence of worker rights in international trade agreements. Another story involved the WTO itself. Divisions exist among member nations. Most industrialized nations favor worker rights in international trade agreements, and most developing nations oppose them.

Should the United States insist on strong and enforceable worker rights in its trade agreements? Most Americans say "yes," but developing countries balk at this when worker rights lead to increased labor costs, causing companies to move elsewhere in the world.

For Discussion and Writing

1. What does globalization mean?
2. Why do developing countries often defend sweatshops and child labor?
3. Do you think globalization is a good thing for the United States? Is it a good thing for developing countries? Why or why not?
4. Do you think there should be international labor standards? Explain.

For Further Reading

Kapstein, Ethan B. *Sharing Wealth, Workers and the World Economy*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1999.

Thomas, Janet. *The Battle in Seattle, The Story Behind and Beyond the WTO Demonstrations*. Golden, Colo.: Fulcrum Publishing, 2000.

ACTIVITY

Global Worker Rights

The World Trade Organization (WTO) makes the rules for international trade. Labor unions and other groups argue that worker rights should be part of these rules. Poor developing countries usually reply that such labor rules make it more difficult to attract foreign companies willing to create much-needed jobs. In this activity, the class will decide what global worker rights the WTO should enforce as part of all free-trade agreements.

A. Form five groups. Each group will discuss the pros and cons of one of the proposed international labor rules, make any changes to the rule the group believes necessary, and decide whether the rule should be adopted.

B. Each group should report on the pros and cons of its rule, what changes, if any, the group made to the rule, and explain its recommendation on whether the rule should be adopted. When all groups have made their presentations, the class should vote on each rule.

Proposed Rules

1. Workers should be limited to an eight-hour day and forty-hour work week. Any worker laboring beyond these hours should be paid overtime. No worker should be allowed to work more than 60 hours per week.
2. Employers must provide a safe working environment for all workers.
3. All workers must be paid a minimum wage, which if paid for a 40-hour week, would provide enough money for basic food and shelter in that nation.
4. All workers have the right to join labor unions and negotiate for higher wages.
5. Any child under the age of 14 may not work if the job prevents the child from attending school.

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PostScript

RESOURCES AND MATERIALS FOR CIVIC EDUCATION

CRF's *Challenge of Governance* Can Help Your Students Achieve Proficiency in the National Standards

Hot off the presses, *The Challenge of Governance* is a 72-page supplementary text covering all the National Standards for Civics and Government in 16 short readings. Following each reading is another high-interest reading on a related current issue. The accompanying teacher's guide provides lesson instructions and copy masters. Each of the 16 lessons includes an interactive activity that fosters critical thinking. This compact curriculum is designed to help students achieve proficiency in the National Standards.

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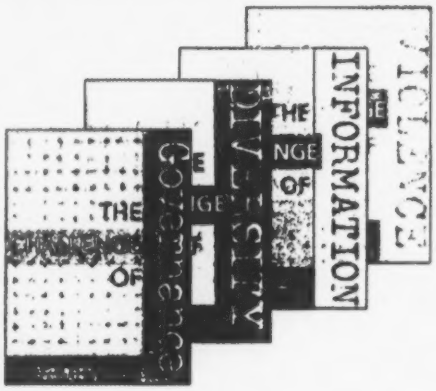

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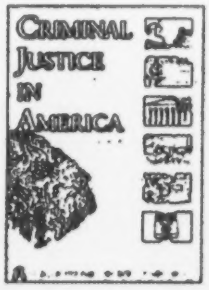
New! Revised! Updated!
Criminal Justice in America

Grades: 9–12



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Constitutional Rights Foundation is a non-profit, non-partisan citizenship education organization with programs and publications on law, government, civic participation, and service learning. Since 1962, CRF has used education to address some of America's most serious youth-related problems: apathy, alienation, and lack of commitment to the values essential to our democratic way of life.

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For more information about CRF programs and curriculum materials, please contact our office at (213) 487-5590; fax (213) 386-0459; e-mail us at crf@crf-usa.org; or visit CRF's web site at **www.crf-usa.org**.

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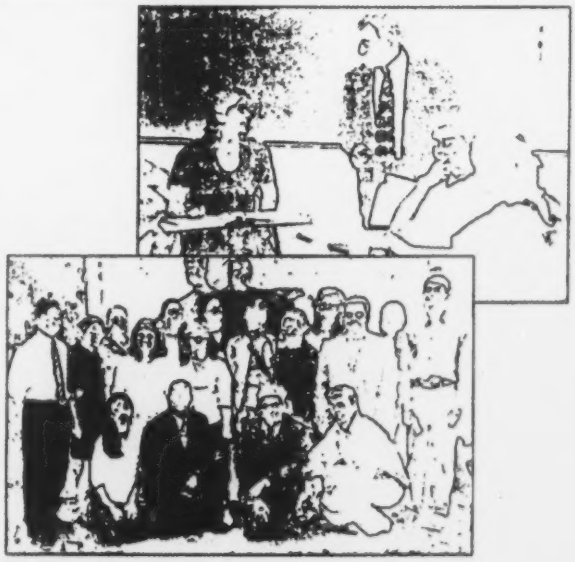

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Questions may be directed to Laura Wesley (213/316-2128 or laura@crf-usa.org) or Katie Moore (213/316-2104 or katie@crf-usa.org).

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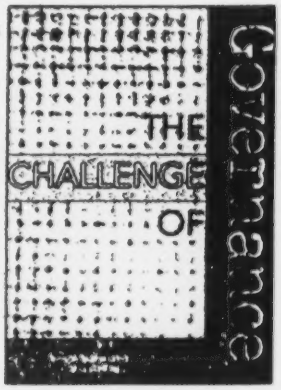

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